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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development: role of the United Nations Environment Programme in the promotion of sustainable production and consumption

Summary

This report presents a summary of the activities undertaken or planned by the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the promotion of sustainable production and consumption and highlights its role in this field.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

1. Note with appreciation the activities so far undertaken by the secretariat at the request of Governing Council to promote the use of cleaner and safer production approaches;

2. Urge Governments, industries and institutions to continue to make efforts to promote and implement preventative strategies such as cleaner production, green productivity, and pollution prevention as preferred options to address environmental problems, and encourage those that have not already done so to sign the International Declaration on Cleaner Production presented at the Fifth International High-level Seminar on Cleaner Production in the Republic of Korea on 29 September 1998, and to take steps to implement the Declaration fully;

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3. Note with appreciation the current work aimed at integrating environmental criteria into economic and financial decision-making, especially with regard to the adoption of cleaner technologies, and at further elaborating mechanisms and procedures for financing cleaner production investments;

4. Encourage the Executive Director to further develop UNEP activities in promoting more sustainable consumption patterns in industry and in the wider community in order to assist developing countries in their programmes of human and social development, including poverty alleviation, and to address resource consumption in major industries;

5. Request the Executive Director to further elaborate draft guidelines for the assessment and evaluation of environmentally sound technologies, including guidelines for exporters of potentially hazardous or outdated technologies, and submit them for consideration of the Governing Council at its twenty-first session;

6. Request the Executive Director to transmit the present report and the outcome of the discussion thereon by the Council to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session.

I. OVERVIEW

1. Current patterns of production and consumption are leading to increased generation of wastes and pollutants, and unsustainable demand on natural resources. Reducing the environmental consequences of this industrial development and of the increase in consumption of goods and services requires a better understanding of the driving forces behind the trends and understanding of the various response options, and formulation of clear policies and strategies for taking action.

2. Accordingly, greater attention needs to be paid to improving resource efficiency of industry, adoption of cleaner and safer methods of production, including in service sectors, and encouraging improvements in the conception and use of products during their entire life-cycle.

3. UNEP commenced to address the issues related to cleaner production – subsequently enlarged to cover the broader theme of sustainable production and consumption – in 1989, at the request of the Governing Council, which in its decision 15/37 of 25 May that year requested UNEP to continue its catalytic role to promote, with Governments, industry, research organizations and other relevant institutions, the establishment of a network that would allow the transfer of environmental protection technologies.

4. Key steps in the development of this programme were:

(a) The launching of the first international high-level cleaner-production seminar in September 1990 in Canterbury, hosted by the Government of the United Kingdom. This seminar:

(i) Adopted the following definition of "cleaner production": "the continuous application of an integrated preventive environmental strategy to processes and products to reduce risks to humans and the environment".

(ii) Agreed that progress in world-wide implementation should be monitored through, among other things, further high-level meetings at periodic intervals;

(iii) Urged UNEP to continue the development of the international Cleaner Production Information Clearing-house and industry sector working groups of international specialists to make information on cleaner production more accessible;

(b) Input by UNEP to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992 which resulted in the cleaner-production concept becoming a part of Agenda 21, chapter 4 (Changing consumption patterns) and chapter 30 (Sustainable production and consumption). Many other chapters also support the cleaner-production concept through specific recommendations;

(c) A high-level seminar in Paris hosted by the French Government in 1992, just after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which stressed the need for more industry participation in the

growing network. The concept of national cleaner-production centres was suggested as a vehicle to catalyse national programmes on training, demonstration, policy advice and information dissemination;

(d) In its decision 17/17 of 21 May 1993, the Governing Council noted progress by the programme, and requested the Executive Director to address the issue of technology transfer by examining the feasibility of elaborating guidelines on what information on potential environmental impacts the exporters of technology should provide to importers;

(e) As part of its catalytic role in national capacity-building within the United Nations system, UNEP joined with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in 1994 to launch the first group of national cleaner-production centres in Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, India, Mexico, Slovakia, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, subsequently joined by Tunisia and Hungary in 1996, and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Viet Nam in 1998. Following the same model, other centres sponsored by bilateral agencies were established in other countries;

(f) At the same time a number of awareness-raising, capacity-building and demonstration activities were launched by UNEP with other organizations in countries such as China, Egypt, Senegal, Poland to demonstrate the economic as well as environmental advantages of the cleaner-production approach;

(g) The 1994 high-level cleaner production seminar in Warsaw, hosted by the Government of Poland, which had as its main outcome the recommendation to accelerate awareness of cleaner production, and to expand the application to cleaner products and services. The seminar also stressed the need to more firmly institutionalize cleaner production in countries and organizations through special programmes;

(h) In its decision 18/23 of 26 May 1995, the Governing Council noted with appreciation the progress made in promoting cleaner and safer production, called upon funding agencies to take the issue into account in their financing programmes, and requested the Executive Director to proceed with drafting guidelines on environmental information needed in relation to technology export;

(i) A 1996 high-level seminar in Oxford, hosted by the Government of the United Kingdom, recommended, inter alia, that a world-wide declaration on cleaner production be developed so as to accelerate the adoption of cleaner production at the highest levels in Governments and companies. It was also decided to give emphasis to stimulate demand for cleaner-production services;

(j) The organization between 1996 and 1998 of a number of regional cleaner-production round tables in Asia, Africa, and Europe demonstrated the effectiveness of the catalytic efforts of the programme;

(k) The subsequent high-level seminar in 1998 in Seoul, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea, included the launching of the Cleaner Production Declaration, for signature by national Governments, companies, industry associations, academia and international organizations. The seminar

agreed that it was a matter of high priority for UNEP to widely promote the Declaration, encourage further signatures, and support and monitor its implementation. It was also considered vital to provide ongoing support measures and capacity-building to cleaner-production programmes in the regions. Finally, the seminar endorsed the increasing shift in the work of UNEP to encompass to sustainable consumption patterns, as well as production.

5. The sustainable production and consumption programme is supported in part by the Environment Fund, and in part by counterpart contributions from Governments, the European Commission, and through in-kind contributions of personnel and meeting support by the Governments of Australia, Denmark, Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. A number of industry associations and companies from all parts of the world are also involved in the programme.

II. ACTIVITIES RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

6. The main achievements of the sustainable production and consumption programme include:

(a) A better definition of the cleaner-production concept and its relationship to similar concepts promoted by other organizations ("eco-efficiency", "green productivity", "pollution prevention", etc.). Advice on its operationalization is contained in a number of UNEP publications such as Government Strategies and Policies for Cleaner Production, Eco-efficiency and Cleaner Production, Charting the Course of Sustainability, several issues of the quarterly review Industry and Environment, and other technically more specialized documents concerning assessment methods, management concepts and application to key industry sectors;

(b) Establishing a greater global awareness of the principles and applicability of cleaner production, and the roles of different industrial and governmental bodies to promote them;

(c) A more effective level of information exchange on cleaner technologies via the International Cleaner Production Information Clearing-house (ICPIC), now accessible on the Internet;

(d) Establishment of international networks of cleaner-production experts and organizations involved in cleaner production, including the functioning of working groups in various industry sectors, and maintaining and updating publications on cleaner-production information sources;

(e) A wider use around the world of cleaner-production diagnostic and management tools by national organizations and institutes, and a rapid increase in interest in adopting environmental management systems and corporate reporting;

(f) An increased capacity of individual countries through the establishment of national cleaner production centres, and other bilateral assistance programmes catalysed by the UNEP programme;

(g) The launching of the above-mentioned International Declaration on Cleaner Production, as a way of enlisting further global support, and the definition of more concrete means of implementation;

(h) The publication and promotion of support material to help national institutes to undertake training programmes;

(i) Cleaner-production demonstration programmes in China and other countries to establish the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the cleaner-production approach;

(j) The initiation of work on consumption issues through life-cycle assessment, eco-design, environmentally sound products, better definition of the sustainable-consumption concept, and linking with others working on consumption issues;

(k) Increased inter-agency cooperation on cleaner production as demonstrated for example by the UNEP/UNIDO national cleaner-production centres, by incorporation of cleaner production centres, by incorporation of cleaner-production principles into the strategies and programmes of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in Pollution Prevention and Abatement Handbook of the World Bank.

7. The proposed UNEP work programme on sustainable production and consumption for the biennium 2000-2001 has been developed to address the outstanding challenges and to adapt the programme of activities to the changing environmental context. The shift in focus involves two aspects, in particular:

(a) A stronger move towards implementation of cleaner and safer production through the use of new environmental-management instruments, with emphasis also on financial mechanisms to promote cleaner-production investments;

(b) A greater focus on upstream aspects of product life-cycle, with particular attention given to promoting sustainable consumption patterns.

8. The future programme of activities would therefore include the following elements:

(a) Fostering effective implementation of the cleaner production approach, in particular by:

(i) Using the Declaration on Cleaner Production as leverage in further awareness-raising, and capacity-building to strengthen existing programmes and reach out to new audiences;

(ii) Further development of and capacity-building on the use of environmental management tools, including environmental reporting and benchmarking;

(iii) Further emphasis on environmental technology assessment (EnTA) as a way of improving technology choices in developing countries;

(b) Improving the financing mechanisms for cleaner-production investments through the launch of a major programme in 1998-2000 (funded by the Government of Norway), including pilot and demonstration studies in a number of countries where cleaner-production programmes need to be strengthened;

(c) Further study of economic instruments and voluntary measures to complement traditional regulatory instruments;

(d) Development of activities concerning sustainable consumption, in particular to focus on consumption patterns and supply-chain management in industry and to build a broader world-wide dialogue on consumption pattern issues generally;

(e) Developing a UNEP initiative with the advertising and marketing sectors to define their role in moving to more sustainable consumption patterns.

III. GAPS AND PROPOSED UNEP ACTION

9. The remaining challenges to a full adoption of cleaner production include:

(a) Further raising of general awareness of the advantages and options in cleaner production, especially by small and medium-size enterprises, through greater use of electronic media, conference presentations and training workshops;

(b) A need to improve the involvement of the banking sector in realizing cleaner-production investments and, concurrently, to boost the ability of small enterprises to formulate cleaner-production investment proposals;

(c) Encouraging of the use of systematic assessment methods for technology options in order to make for more informed choices concerning technology transfer, and to identify the environmental implications of various technologies;

(d) Encouraging greater incorporation of sustainable production and consumption as key learning items in the undergraduate training of professionals in all counties, by engaging the formal tertiary education sector in a stronger dialogue on curriculum change in that direction;

(e) Catalysing a stronger move from awareness to action by the various stakeholders and partners in cleaner production through demonstration and pilot projects, and by encouraging benchmarking among cleaner-production programmes and centres;

(f) Further examining the underlying factors and mechanism for the transfer of outdated technologies, and developing further information exchange in this regard so as to foster a greater application of environmentally sound technologies in all countries;

(g) Further definition of the sustainable-consumption concept and the driving forces behind it so that consumption contributes appropriately to economic and social development, including respect for environmental sustainability, and strengthening dialogue with policy makers and other stakeholders at the national and international levels.

9. The UNEP programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001, contained in document UNEP/GC.20/22, addresses the above gaps and outlines proposed activities and initiatives for UNEP to take, in association with other partners in the United Nations system and outside, to assist Governments and industry to adopt the necessary policies and strategies concerning sustainable production and consumption so as to achieve economic and social benefits alongside environmental improvements.